

Sample Weekly Discussion Questions and In-Class Activities for Comp I



Sample Discussion Questions that I make due before class. They have one week to complete these "DQs."

The Personal Essay

In what ways do Nye and Sedaris demonstrate the features of the form Ballenger talks about on p. 94? In what ways do they differ from his description? Be sure to give specific examples. Finally: what do you think is the controlling idea (the "so what" of Nye and Sedaris?)

Excerpt from syllabus:

The purpose of discussion questions is threefold: 1) to prepare you for class discussion; 2) to generate ideas for your own essays through analyzing readings; and 3) to practice writing brief analysis, frequently required in an academic atmosphere. **Late discussion question posts will not be accepted.** Frequently, students will be required to read and comment on classmates' posts; therefore, should you post late, students will lose the benefit of your individual point of view; moreover, discussion questions generally aid in the current writing project; completing a discussion question after the writing project due date negates the purpose of the assignment. **Your discussion questions will total 15% of your grade.**

Moreover, I grade discussion questions based on depth of thought, organization of thought, and on style and grammar.

[You'll note that I've adapted many of my discussion questions from the common syllabus Reading Responses.]

This week I'd like you to focus on the personal essay writing process. Respond here and tell me about your game plan. What is the controlling idea/theme of your essay? Have you taken the ordinary and made it extraordinary? Why did you choose this topic? How do you plan to grab the reader's attention from the beginning? What kind of show language do you intend to bring in? What is the "So What?" (remember that in "The Barn," it was her loss of innocence--she knew then that she could die and she ceased taking risks.) Sketch for me a brief outline. You don't have to "stick" to the outline, but I'd like to see some forethought go into the process.

Due before class on Monday the 25th.

This week, I'd like you to go to this [Website](http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474976895259) and read about Showing and Telling, then post a healthy paragraph (minimum 100 words) from your personal essay in which you "show" a scene to your reader. This is due by Monday, Feb. 1st, before class.

[Use whatever website you wish; I used this one:

<http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474976895259>]

Take a look at your personal essay and locate and post two grammatically correct examples of the following:

- Complete Simple Sentences
- Complex Sentences
- Compound Sentences
- Compound-Complex Sentences
- Sentences with active verbs

Be sure and proof your paper carefully, looking specifically for comma errors.

Discovery Essay

Show and explain how Garrett-Brown and Holmquist (look under Document Sharing for this article) are discovery essays rather than traditional research papers. What is the overall controlling idea of each, and how does each author show and support it? The two authors include their own voices but still employ research: how do they do that successfully (or not)? How do these essays—and Ballenger's suggestions for research papers (p. 429-33; 456)—help you think about how you might approach Essay 2? Be sure to give and cite examples from all three texts in your response. Due before class next Monday.

Review the rules for Cohesion, Coherence, and Emphasis (PPT listed under Portfolio 2) and use these rules to work over one full page of your draft. Copy and paste the draft into your post and:

Bold key words/phrases that create coherence

Underline key words/phrases that create cohesion

And *italicize* words/phrases that are emphasized for greater effect

Please have this done by Monday, before class.

[I'm happy to share all my PPTs—just send me an email at lynda.davis@tcu.edu]

The Profile

In what ways do " [Home Girl](#) " and the Sample Student Profile on Dr. Flowers surprise you and why? What confuses you and why? Using your understanding of the profile given on pages 133-137 (of *The Curious Writer*), how do the readings help you think about or model the profile essay? Analyze how the essays follow Ballenger's description. Are there any issues in the essays that are not covered by Ballenger? What are they and what do you think about them? Most importantly, follow up such questions by contemplating *why*. The goal of these discussion questions is to move beyond your first reaction to analysis. Remember to proofread carefully and use examples from the texts (citing page numbers) to make your arguments.

There is no word limit, but for maximum grade, I expect in-depth analysis and attempts at "meaning making" from the texts. The discussion is due by Monday, class time.

[Home Girl: I copy and pasted it from the internet so that students wouldn't have to click "next" continually. E-mail me and I'll send you the doc.]

The Argument

This week you were to read "Getting Real in the Classroom," by Ellen Goodman (page 278-79) and "I am Not a Savage," by Kelly Sundberg. Read the essays carefully and analyze them according to the criteria you learned in Chapter 8. Consider the writer's arguments and explain their main claims and premises or assumptions behind them. To refresh your memory about these terms and what they mean, consult "Features of the Form" found in Chapter 8. What basic arguments strategies the writers seems to use (see page 280). While reading, consider how they use evidence, how they use their voice and their experience as authority, and how they use tone. Do they "bow with respect" to the issue? Explain your opinion. Remember to give examples from the text to back up your answer. Please have this assignment done by class time next Monday. Read and comment to at least one other student's post.

[could also use "Still Trying to Kick the Kink" by Erin Aubry Kaplan on page 283]

This week we went over Syllogism and Enthymemes. I've attached the handout as a reminder for you. For this discussion question, you are to locate one argument that uses deductive logic, one argument that uses inductive logic, and one enthymeme. You can use the readings from this week, you can use your own essay, or you can use something you see on television, billboards, bumper stickers, etc. Due before class on Monday the 5th.

This week, I want you all to really think about how you have organized your paper. On your thread, please provide an outline of your paper following the example below.

Title:

Introduction:

Thesis or controlling idea:

Paragraph 1: (provide 1 to 4 or 5 words that sums up the controlling idea of this paragraph)

Transition to next paragraph? y/n

Paragraph 2: (same as 1)

Transition to next paragraph? y/n

and so on . . . until your conclusion

After you've done this, spend a few minutes thinking about the way your paragraphs flow. Do they flow naturally? For example, from big ideas to small or small idea to big? Are like arguments grouped together? Have you considered counter-arguments? Is your argument a viable argument? In other words, is it one that would likely have an opposing audience rather than an audience in which everyone agrees (ex: "We need to stop world hunger.")? (Note

below a list of what I'm looking for in a quality paper.) Post your outline when you are satisfied. Due by class time on Monday, the 19th.

In this essay, I am looking for a complex persuasive essay that seeks to convince others that your opinions are worthy of consideration by:

- focusing implicitly or explicitly on a researched topic
- providing balanced and thoughtful evidence (through a number of ways that may incorporate *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*: personal experience or observations, secondary research, primary research, etc.) that is specific and appropriate to the topic and for the audience
- addressing and challenging **one or more of the counterarguments** offered by those who take a different position than yours.
- having an opening paragraph that engages the reader, and a closing paragraph that leaves the reader thinking (rather than merely re-telling what the paper has already discussed).
- writing with a controlling idea that is **complex** and shows **genuine inquiry** and, according to Ballenger, "is clear about what it is asking readers to do or believe" (*The Curious Writer* 286). The topic is appropriately narrow and fresh, not too broad (gun control) or too simplistic (drunk driving is bad).
- acknowledging your own positionality and biases in the sources used
- incorporating sources well to build a claim and putting those sources in conversation with each other.
- organizing, building, and demonstrating the controlling idea throughout ("flow")
- incorporating four sources correctly using MLA format in the text and in the works cited.
- writing which shows sophistication on the sentence level with sentence variety and a sense of the writer's "voice"

A Fun Assignment for Anytime, Any Comp Class. The students really enjoy this one. We go over and talk about students' posts in class.

As you drive around town or the campus parking lot or the city, notice the various bumper stickers that attempt to persuade us to: adopt a philosophy of life, warn us of a terrible harm/situation, vote for something/someone, or sell us a product. Select one bumper sticker; in about 100 words, tell us what "rhetoric" it uses to persuade and what it is trying to persuade. Log onto two of your classmates threads and make comments. Be sure and give your thread a catchy title. Proof and correct your post before your final submission. The initial post is due Saturday night, and your responses are due by Sunday night.

- While driving around town, I saw an old pick-up truck sporting a sticker that read, "Don't Let Annie Get Your Gun." The name "Annie" in the sticker has a double meaning. First, the name refers to a past Texas Governor, the late Anne Richards, who fought against a bill passed in Texas allowing citizens to legally carry a handgun. Second, the name alludes to an early 19th century exhibition sharpshooter Annie Oakley, who starred in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Although humorous, the creator makes a rhetorical statement that persuades citizens that Annie Richards (or the government) will "get their gun," a right to bear arms, they typically argue, given in Second Amendment. If we consider this in the context of our ethnographic essay: we may take notice that the driver of this truck is, most likely, male and a member of the

NRA (National Rifle Association), who publicly opposed Richards's administration. Furthermore, by denigrating Anne Richard's name to "Annie," the sticker's creator has belittled the respect a governor of Texas deserves and relegated her position to that of a child.

End of Semester

I would like to hear about your writing experience and what you think good writing is.

- go back into your journal from the beginning of the semester and read what you wrote about your previous experience with the act of writing
- reflect on Ballenger's text as well as the essays you've read for this course (in class readings and those of your classmates)
- and reflect on the peer review comments by fellow students and those by me on your papers
- After your reflection, gather your thoughts and compose a post in which you tell me what you now feel constitutes good writing. Be aware that this answer is relative and will probably change every semester you are here. Also tell me whether you feel your writing has improved, and if it so, how? What do you think are your strengths, and what do you feel are your weaknesses?

I realize you may not be comfortable publishing these thoughts. Feel free to post your answer in your journal. Just please add a post here and tell me to look in the journal. There is no word limit, but I hazard to think that you could not answer this in a brief post. In reading your response, I expect to see the development that you expressed to be exhibited in that piece, i.e., flow, clarity, & cohesion, to name a few.

Extra Credit

For your extra credit Discussion Question, submit a rhetorical analysis of a television commercial(s) of your choice. Your rhetorical analysis (minimum 300 words) should be based on a close observation of that advertisement. In your analysis, you need to describe the commercial's audience, purpose, and context. To aid you in discovering the intended audience, consider the viewing demographic of the program the spot sponsors. Is it *Gossip Girl*? Or is it *Wheel of Fortune*? These two shows appeal to polar opposite audiences.

Consider analyzing the intended audience according to demographics of age, gender, race, political persuasion, income level, region, professional and leisure interests, etc. Point to specific features of the commercial that give you clues to the intended audience. Who are these advertisers? Where do they get their authority as experts on what we need or want? Do you see any level of research in this piece? How would you characterize the commercial's style? Is it funny? Serious? Scary? Embarrassing? Finally, be sure to discuss how this commercial persuasive appeal (ethos, pathos, or logos) affects the way viewers see their world.

I'll post the extra credit on Week ___. So, if you score 100 for that week and 80 for this essay, you'll see 180 posted in the grade book.

Sample In-Class and/or Journal Writing Activities

Writing History

I typically assign the writing history (from the common syllabus) to be done in the journal the first week of school. Assignment will be provided to you by Dr. Leverenz.

Personal Essay

Have students open the journal and list ten things they think they are either good at or an expert on. Believe it or not, they really have trouble just getting that far. Next ask them to highlight three that really interest them. Then have them select one and do a fast write for 3- to 5- minutes. Tell them they cannot stop, cannot correct grammar or misspelled words, or pause—if they don't know what to type, have them write, "I'm good at this because" over and over again until they get inspired. I've posted a sample from a student's journal, which ended in a nice personal essay.

Student Journal Response:

Ten things I am good at:

1. listening
2. not giving up
3. cheering people up
4. eating
5. going out
6. learning from past experiences
7. shopping

i am good at learning from past experiences because every time i make a mistake or make a right choice i learn from that experience and try to use it in future decisions i have to make. there was once when every time my mother used to take us to spend time together as a family i would argue and find excuses to stay home instead of going with them. i did this for many years until once i argued so much i made my mom feel bad and when we went to my quinta my mom fell off a horse and i thought she would never get up. all this time the only thing i could think about was all the time i could have spent with my family and did not or simply did it with a lot of arguing. after this event i changed my way of thinking of spending family time.

Discovery Essay:

Like the personal essay activity, have students make a list of 10 things they would like to know more about. Have them select one and journal write for 3 to 5 minutes, writing everything they know about that subject. Remind them that they might want to refer to their journal when writing their papers because it can be hard to remember what their previous opinions were, and these previous opinions will need to be incorporated into their discovery essays.

Bring to class: five books, five journal articles with information pages attached, five DVDs, five links to websites or five print-outs of webpages, and five fictitious interviews—just make something up on a piece of paper. Divide students into five groups and have them create

both an in-text citation and a Works Cited entry for each item. Have a representative from each group go to the board and write their examples for each. For those groups that are right, have a prize—like candy (they love this). Hint: Have a ready printout handy with all the answers before doing the activity.

Profile Essay:

Self-profile

To help you think about potential sources of information for your Profile assignment, I want you to imagine that YOU are the subject of a profile and that you will be guiding the writer to relevant information about you. In your journal, answer the questions below as fully as you can:

- 1) What might your profile emphasize or reveal about you?
- 2) What questions should a good interviewer ask in order to elicit a complex understanding of who you are. List 10 questions.
- 3) Who else should the interviewer talk to about you? What kind of information might these other sources yield?
- 4) What kinds of observations might someone do? What might these observations reveal?
- 5) What kind of additional secondary research might someone do in order to learn more about you?

When you are done, share your findings with the student on the left and on the right of you.

For the following group activity (which the students really love), retrieve interesting photos from peopleofwalmart.com, or some other site, and put them in a word doc and upload it on eCollege. Allow 20+ minutes for this activity—5 to 10 to work on the assignment, and 5 to 10 to share findings with class:

In groups of four, download the attached file of images and select one to write an imaginary profile on. This profile should have:

- quotes from the subject of profile
- quotes from sources other than subject--some friends, a boss, or family member
- maybe some database about whatever it is that makes this person extraordinary. If he is a pathological / compulsive liar, then add some facts (made-up facts, I know, for the sake of time--just make up the sources names, journal name, etc) about pathological lying
- give your character a history.

Argument Paper:

In your journal:

- Make a quick list of issues that have provoked disagreements between groups of people in your hometown or local community.
- Make a quick list of issues that have provoked disagreements on the TCU campus.
- Make another list of issues that have created controversy between groups of people in your state.
- Make a list of pet peeves you have.
- Now make a list of questions you have about these topics.

[This was a standby activity that I never got to use, but I think it is a good one; I got it from Ballenger.]

Do a Web search to find op-ed essays written by one or more of the following national columnists:

- Ellen Goodman
- Cal Thomas
- George Will,
- David Broder
- Nat Hentoff
- Mary McGrory
- Molly Ivins
- Bob Herbert
- Clarence Page

Now, select one topic and spend five minutes fastwriting on the topic. Try to move away from your parent's position, and come to grips with your own opinions.

Grammar and sentence structure:

[For this exercise, we discuss when passive voice is good and when it is not. I also explain that prepositional phrases can trick them into using improper grammar.]

Part 1: In this week's journal entry, list an example of the following:

- a) A passive sentence that should be changed
- b) Revise that sentence into the active
- c) An example of a passive sentence in which the passive voice is preferred; explain why it is preferred.

Click this link for help with the [Passive Voice](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/passive.htm). (<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/passive.htm>)

Part 2: Copy one full page out of your draft into your journal. Highlight in yellow all "being verbs" (am, is, are, was, were, be, to be, etc.) and passive verbs. Highlight in green all prepositional phrases. ([link to list of prepositions](#)) (http://www.abcteach.com/free//list_prepositions.pdf)

Look at any passive verbs you may have used. Are they warranted? Would these sentences be

more effective written in active voice? Are your sentences loaded with prepositional phrases? Do the prepositional phrases interfere with clarity and grammatical construction?

Did this exercise help you with your writing process? Feel free to write about the process in your journal.

Remember: When revising your paper, you are expected to edit out all unnecessary passive voice verbs and wordiness.

[Grammar Activity great for **Profile** assignment:] In your journal copy and copy & paste the excerpt below. Underline the words and phrases that create both cohesion (logical connections between sentences) and coherence (consistent topic).

“Home Girl” by Michael Hall

Erykah Badu, known variously over the past decade as the Queen of Neo-soul, the Nefertiti of Hip-hop, and the Woman Who Wears That Thing on Her Head, sat on her couch rubbing Blue Magic conditioner into her daughter’s hair, tying clumps together and wrapping them with rubber bands while she talked about the giant, red, mazelike circle painted on the floor at her feet. “Actually, it’s not a maze,” she said. “A maze is designed to puzzle. It’s a labyrinth—there’s one entrance and one way to the center. It kind of looks like a brain. It’s very meditative. The labyrinth is an ancient symbol; you find them all over Europe and Asia. I wanted to create a nourishing environment, a place I could retreat to when things got too busy for me.”

I couldn’t tell if Puma, who is two and a half years old, with light skin and puffed cheeks, was more unhappy about what was being done to her hair or sharing her mother’s attention with a stranger. She squirmed and fussed, stretching her head out of reach, then climbed down and stood on the floor, glaring. The 35-year-old Badu asked Ysheka, one of her assistants, to bring a bottle, and when it came, the toddler climbed back into her mother’s lap and drank quietly.

Badu’s three other assistants—Denise, Sharlene, and Alfredo—hustled around in their bare feet, cleaning, making phone calls, getting things ready for the afternoon. It was just after eleven on an October morning at Badu’s house on the shores of White Rock Lake, in East Dallas. I was there to spend a day with her, to find out just what a Dallas R&B star does with her time, especially one approaching her ten-year anniversary in the pop music limelight, a year that by all rights should see her finishing up her fifth album, the one that her record label and her fans have been expecting since 2005.

I had already learned something that morning about waiting for Badu. She had been in her home studio until five in the morning, so we had started our interview almost two hours late. Badu admits that her own conception of the temporal rarely coincides with the one used by people who wear watches. Now, holding her daughter, she talked, again in her own way, about time. “The last ten years have been like a circle,” she said, “going back to Chinese astrology. I got my record deal in 1996, which was the Year of the Pig, and my first album

came out in 1997. I was born in 1971, which was also the Year of the Pig. And 2007 will be the Year of the Pig again. I know this year will be special.”